**Chicano theatre summary**

Since the Spanish explorers arrived in the Americas in the 1600s, Los Angelos and San Francisco have been central to Hispanic theatre. By the 1920s, Chicano theatre was popular all across the country and included all types of plays- from lighthearted musicals to more serious productions that addressed communal issues. During the civil rights movement of the 1960s, Luis Valdez joined forces with Cesar Chavez in a workers strike in California, making him the leading figure for migrant workers and father of Chicano theatre. He formed the “El Teatro Campesino” (Farm Workers Theatre). Several similar groups were formed after being inspired by El Teatro Campesino, and at its peak there was over 100 similar Chicano theatre groups. An organization called TENAZ sponsors festivals where the groups meet and collaborate.

**Mexican American Theatre**

The Problem of Nomenclature

Historically, the Mexican culture has faced issues of nomenclature. From the 1590’s to 1823, they are referred to as Spanish, from 1823-1845 Mexicans, and since 1845 Mexican Americans.

**Spanish settlement**

In 1642, Diego de Vargas established settlements around the old pueblos in Northern New Mexico that were able to remain isolated until after the second world war. This area was isolated by a combination of geographical structure and hostile Native American tribes. These hostile tribes were not able to be submitted until after 1848, and then the Spanish were able to settle in other Southwestern areas more freely.

Anglo Americans and Mexican Americans: The 19th Century

After winning Mexican independence, the Mexican populations in Mexico city and Texas were greatly outnumbered by Anglo settlers. In order to combat this, they placed unwanted sanctions on these areas, which created animosity among both the Mexicans and Anglos. After Texas was admitted to the union in 1845, these Hispanics became the first “Mexican Americans”.

The gold rush in 1849 caused several Anglo Americans to immigrate to California. During this time, the Mexican Americans and Anglos both fought against Indians and created the structure of the southwest that is present today. However, the groups still remain ignorant of each other’s culture. Also, each cultural group has lived exclusively in solidarity, which furthers the cultural gab between them. The Mexican American theatre reflects the view that others have on their culture.

**Early Theatre: The Biblical Narratives**

From 1845-1875, the Mexican American theatre reflected the biblical themes of the colonial culture. Plays centered around biblical narrative, and were often supervised by Parish Priests. Because of the clergy’s supervision over the theatre at this time, the productions always reflected the moral and ethical code that was administered by the Church, rather than reflecting aspects of their culture.

**Professional Troupes from Mexico**

From the 1870s until the Great Depression, Mexican theatre troupes began crossing the border into Texas. These amateur performers then began to mimic the performance styles of the professional actors around them. The most popular of these troupes, the Hernandez Villalongin, had 146 plays in this stock, with most coming from Spain. However, a considerable amount of their plays were Mexican. The demand for productions on the troupe was high because of their stable repertoire. The performances in the troupe were of top quality because of the rigorous rehearsals that the actors underwent. Members of the Hernandez and Villalongin families always occupied the lead roles in the plays, while other actors typically occupied secondary roles. By early 1900s, some of these troops began to perform in the US more than they did in Mexico.

**From Immigrant to Resident Troupes: The Early 20th Century**

With the Mexican American War in 1910, several immigrants began streaming into the US, along with several new Mexican acting troupes. The most popular of these was the la Compania Dramatica de Carlos Villalongin. The influx of Mexican immigrants made Mexican theatre more popular at the time, and caused the style of the performances to pertain to Mexican production styles. Also, the troupe expanded in employing people other than family members for the lead roles of its plays. Because of the larger demand for Mexican theatre, Mexican troupes now were able to become more selective for when and whom they performed for, rather than performing at the frenetic rate that had been popular before.

**Interim Years: 1929-1965**

The Mexican theatre business was affected negatively when Mexican-American stock companies were hit with the great depression. However, amateur productions, particularly those dealing with religion, continued to be attract audiences in the southwest.

**Teatro Campesino**

In 1965, Cesar Chavez lead a successful revolt of Mexican workers in Delano, California. The theatre that followed this strike was designed to convince Mexican Americans that it was a worthy cause to join, and that it was possible to win. El Teatro Campesino (the Farm Worker’s Theatre) used dark humor and improvised scenes to build cohesion among Mexican American workers. Teatro’s plays not only focused on the injustice in the workplaces, but went farther in exposing issues of racism, discrimination in schools, and social injustice. In order to expose these injustices, the characters in the play were typically over-exaggerated so that they could represent the two distinct sides of good and evil effectively. *Zoot Suit* does not have these characteristics, and uses skilled performers to convey a deeper storyline.

**Cuban American Theatre**

Cuban Theatre in the US with Cuban immigrant communities in New York and Tampa at the end of the 19th century. At the beginning of the 20th century, Cuban melodramas and lyric theatre was particularly popular among the Hispanic community. Tampa was the site of the only Hispanic Federal Theatre Project. In 1959, the Cuban revolution had a large impact on Cuban theatre. After this event, the primary concern of playwrights was to criticize Fidel Castro, and lament on free life before they were forced to immigrate to the U.S.

**Hispanic Theatre**

The rapid growth of Spanish speaking people in the US has resulted in a simultaneous growth of Spanish theatre. This style of theatre comes from Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. Documentation of Spanish Theatre’s checkered history is scarce because it is not valued by traditional circles. Spanish theatre is divided into Chicano (west and southwest), Cuban (New York and Florida), and Nuyorican (the Puerto Rican component).

**Puerto Rican Theatre on the Mainland**

Puerto Rican theatre reflects the issues that Puerto Ricans face in urban communities, especially in New York. The goal of many Puerto Rican immigrants is to return back to their. Therefore, the goal of Puerto Rican theatre in the US is to keep Puerto Rican culture alive while they obtain the money they need to return home. Puerto Rican Theatre is actor focused, and lacks exuberant special effects and lighting. Rather, their performances focus on taking pride in being Puerto Rican.

**Theatrical Tradition**

Puerto Rico’s theatrical history begins with Spanish settlers, who implemented religious theatre centered around the church. During the 19th century, control by the Spanish prevented Puerto Rican writers from producing original material out of fear of political repercussions. Puerto Rican theatre in the late 1890’s reflects anger toward the newly arrived American troops because of their economic control, socialist principles, and social injustice. In the 1950’s and 1960’s, a group called La Farandula Oberra performed plays that exposed the problems faced by Puerto Rican workers during and after the great depression.

**Immigrant Life and Culture**

The first large influx of Puerto Ricans into the US was caused by large unemployment rates in 1941, and Puerto Ricans began to work a large amount of the factory jobs needed to support the war. This immigration was virtually forced because of these conditions, so the Puerto Ricans faced a great deal of social injustice in the US. 70% of Puerto Ricans in the US have settled in New York. Puerto Ricans are the poorest of all minority groups in the US. Language is a major barrier that contributes to this. For Puerto Ricans, English acts as a means of preventing them from seeking quality education and lucrative employment. These difficulties are reflected in the Puerto Rican theatre and literature.

**The Idea of the Mainland Theatre**

The New York Shakespeare Festival has recently put forth an effort to bring minority groups theatrical productions to the forefront. The poverty of the Puerto Rican community, their lack of exposure to theatre, and the language barrier mentioned earlier, makes it difficult for Puerto Rican theatre to gain recognition. However, the theatre is critical for Puerto Ricans in maintaining their culture while living in the US. Therefore, Puerto Ricans face trouble in selecting language, set design, and costumes for their performances. Do they make them easy to understand for American viewers, or keep them exclusive for Puerto Ricans and preserve their culture?

**Groups and Productions**

In the earliest years of immigration, there was dispersed efforts to create plays that brought the Puerto Rican homeland to the US. *La Carreta* (1952) was the first play to perform in front of a sold out audience, until it was later closed by the fire department. Now, The New York Shakespeare festival serves as the main platform for bringing Puerto Rican theatre to the public.

**The Puerto Rican Travelling Theatre**

The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre is a bilingual company that performs productions composed by Puerto Rican authors. It provides plays free of charge and has had over 500 productions since 1967. Most of the performances are given in impoverished neighborhoods, with a small amount of the play being performed for middle class audiences. The plays aim at preserving cultural heritage and tradition in the face of difficulties such as racism and discrimination. For example, *Encrucijada* was a play staged by the company in 1969 that tells the tale of a Puerto Rican family who is unable to achieve a comfortable life in New York because of the unfortunate situation they are placed in largely because of their race. Also, the play *The Golden Streets* by Piri Thomas deals with drug addiction and the effects that this has on the family. In conclusion, the Puerto Rican Traveling theatre has does an incredible job in bringing Puerto Rican theatre to the forefront of theatre in the US.

**The Puerto Rican Ensemble and Other Groups**

The Puerto Rican Ensemble, formed in 1968, incorporates community members (rather than professionals) into its work, and therefore relates more closely to the Puerto Rican community itself. The ensemble was especially useful in combatting animosity toward Puerto Ricans that stemmed from a misunderstanding of the Vietnam war (ignorant people thought that the Puerto Ricans were Vietnamese). The Puerto Rican Ensemble was formed in East Harlem, and this ensemble formed two theatre groups that use theatre as a vehicle to promote help for the poverty in third world countries. Other similar groups, such as Jurutungo at Brooklyn college, work to promote these same things on college campus, a particularly effective setting for combatting these issues. Because of these efforts, the Puerto Rican mainland theatre now has a very promising future.